

ARCHITECTURAL

HISTORICAL TOUR



DOWNTOWN
BLOOMINGTON
ILLINOIS

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McLean County Arts Council

This walking tour is one of a series of tours of historic McLean County. This walk describes Bloomington as it is May 1, 1979. The tour was prepared under the auspices of the McLean County Arts Council and written by staff writer Deborah Corra in cooperation with Greg Koos of the McLean County Historical Society.

We wish to thank Wade Abels for his review and comment on the material in this tour.

[1] Numbers in brackets refer to the corresponding numbers on the map on the back cover.

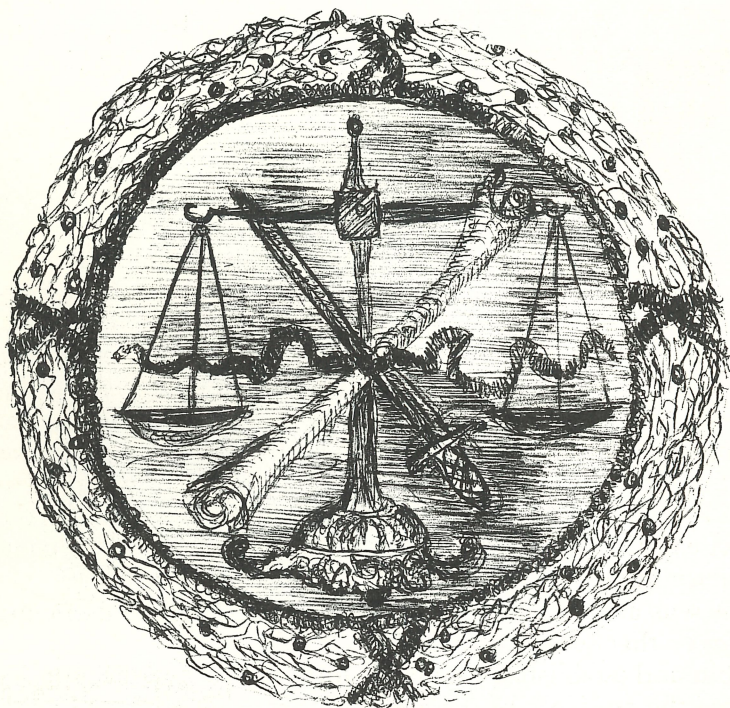
Drawings by Suan Guess-Welcker.

Cover: A composite of commercial facades on Front & Main Streets in downtown Bloomington.

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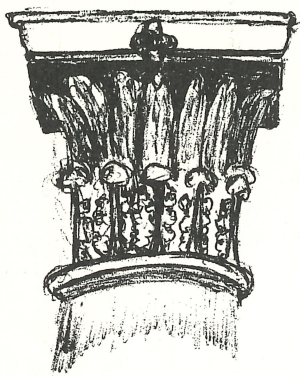


Design from Judge's Bench in Courthouse.

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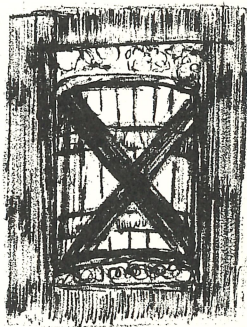
Architectural-Historical Tour

Downtown, Bloomington



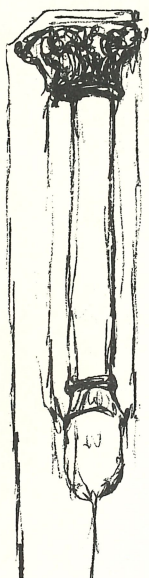
The tour begins at the corner of Grove and East Streets at the McBarnes Memorial Building[1] which was built with funds from Mr. and Mrs. John McBarnes and the McLean County Board of Supervisors in 1923 in eclectic Neo-Classic style as a memorial to McLean County citizens who served in World War I. The stone carving is the work of Joseph Petarde, an Italian immigrant who became famous for his work in central Illinois. Of particular interest are the Egyptian-like corn leaf capitals, the stylized relief over the third floor and the *fascies* (a bundle of rods crossed by handles — the ancient symbol of the Roman state) on the third floor. This building houses the McLean County Historical Society Museum and other community agencies.

It was at this location, on the northern edge of Blooming Grove, that James Allin built a small cabin and established a general store to serve the residents of the area. At that time St. Louis was a thriving metropolis, Chicago a small port and Peoria a good-sized fort. The rest of central Illinois was uncharted Indian territory, the home of the Kickapoo and Pottawatomie. Allin thought that it was a good place for a town as travelers needed a stopover between the rapids of the Illinois River at LaSalle and the civilized Vandalia region.



Walk north on East Street to Front Street

Cross to the southwest corner of the intersection where the Major's Hall Memorial[2] is located. A plaque on the west



side of the wall pictures Major's Hall which once stood at this location. The Republican Party got a big boost in its formation on this spot by Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln was a frequent visitor and friend of many influential citizens, such as David Davis and Asahel Gridley. He delivered the famous "Lost Speech" here. His speech was a moving one and this is cited as the reason reporters were unable to record precisely what was said. The Lost Speech was instrumental in pulling together the diverse elements in Illinois which became the Republican Party.

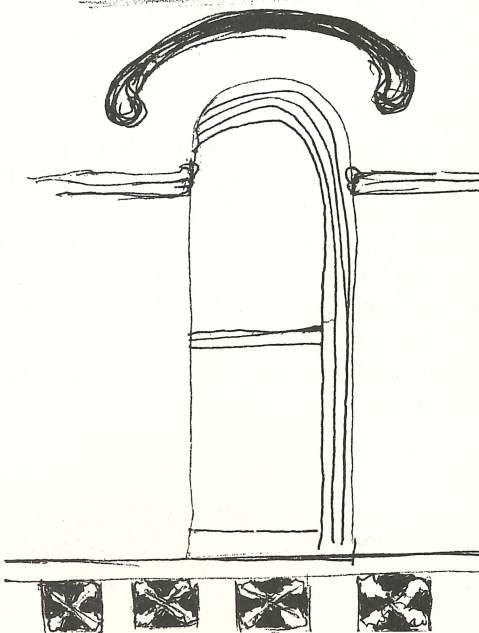
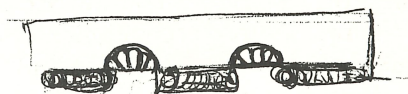
Major's Hall also housed the State Normal University, the first university in Illinois, during its first three years of existence, 1857-1860.

Looking north across Front Street you can see the contrast between a building restored, the Twenty Grant Tap[3], and buildings ignored[4], the rest of the block to East Street. These buildings were called

the Gridley Block and show good stone work and carving.

Walk west to Main Street

Under the pinkish metal facing[5] on the northeast corner stand two buildings built by James Miller and David Davis in 1843. They were constructed with local brick and wood. All the hardware and glass were carted from Pekin, brought in by ox-drawn wagons. Railroads were ten years in the future. Here in Davis's of-



fice many prominent men, including Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, John Stuart, Jesse Fell and Asahel Gridley, would gather to discuss the issues of the day.

On the north side of Front Street, between Main and Center, stands a block of buildings[6] which date from 1855. These were built in the Italianate style, designed to resemble the galleries of Florence. Note the unity of line and how the "modern" facades appear more dated.

These two blocks of Front Street, between Center and East Streets, were the commercial and political heart of the county. Walking on Front Street you could have heard heated arguments concerning Dred Scott, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, railroads and immigration. You might have seen an employment sign reading, "No dogs or Irish need apply."

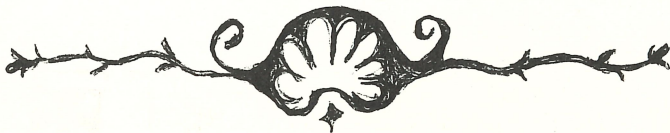
Walk north on Main Street

On the west side of Main Street between Front and Washington are two surviving examples of Victorian era store fronts with Greek character[7] (H. R. Block and Household Finance) which were built in 1855. Note the brick frieze along the top of the buildings. The window treatment was typical of this style with the straight lintels over multi-paned windows.

Cross Main Street at the alley

(to view buildings on east side of the street)

The building south of Moberly & Klenner[8] has one of the few remaining cornices in the heavy bracketed style of the Victorian period. At one time many of the downtown buildings had this stamped metal "cap" on them. The builders obviously felt it lent beauty to an unadorned building. It is a fine example of the popular application of decorative metal, a new use of metal developed with the progress of the industrial revolution.



Walk north and cross Washington Street

On the south side of Washington Street, between Main and Center, stand two of the original buildings of the Phoenix Block[9] (Sorgs and Uniform World), so-named because the buildings were immediately rebuilt after a fire in 1854 — Phoenix rising from the ashes. These are also in the Victorian Greek manner and Uniform World still retains the typical brick frieze. In his office (above Sorgs), Kersey Fell was the first to suggest to Lincoln that he should run for the presidency.

Continue north on Main Street

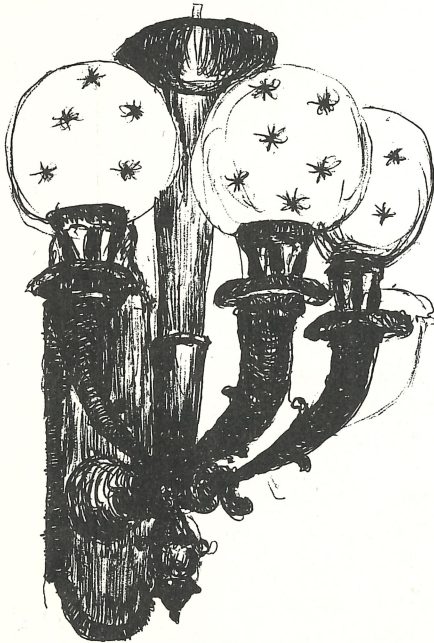
On the east side of Main Street is the Cole Building[10], housing the American State Bank. This structure, built after the 1900 fire, shows a fanciful original design achieved in brick and terra cotta. Notice the stone carving between the

third and fourth floors and the terra cotta “dentils” above the fourth floor.

Walk to the Courthouse east entrance

This is the fourth courthouse[11] in Bloomington and was built in 1902. The first was erected in 1832 for \$339.25; it also served as a school house and public meeting place. Then in 1836 a new structure was needed to handle the growing community; Bloomington was then the county seat.

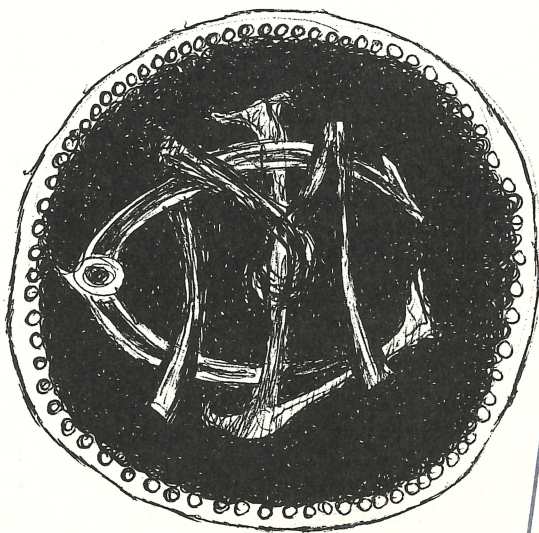
Two important cases concerning school segregation were heard in this building. In 1871 Judge Tipton ruled in favor of the Bloomington school board, upholding the practice of racial segregation on the grounds that the school trustees had the right to decide which children should study what subjects in which location. If the citizens were dissatisfied they could



seek redress at the polls by electing different trustees. In 1872 another case concerning segregation was brought to court, this time from the Danvers school district. In this case Judge Tipton ruled against segregation as a waste of money to build separate facilities for only 2-4 students. The Danvers case was appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court in 1874 where Judge Tipton's decision was upheld and applied to the entire state; thus the banning of racial segregation in the schools of Illinois was based on economic considerations.

The third courthouse was under construction from 1868 through 1879. It was so badly damaged in the 1900 fire that it had to be virtually torn down and replaced by the present structure. Pieces of the third courthouse can be found at various locations around Bloomington; the most prominent are the steel framing from the dome in Miller Park and the carved stone capitals on the Summit Street Bridge along the eastern edge of Miller Park.

The present courthouse is an excellent example of the Neo-Roman Classical Revival style. Notice the mosaic floor and ceiling at the entrance and also the black marble. The interior of the courthouse has complete unity of design: the counter and door mouldings are consistent throughout the building and all door knobs have an MCL design.



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Go to the second floor

Enter the old courtroom to the north, through the beveled glass doors (light switch to your right). This room, recently restored, is the best example of the intended effect of the architecture.

Leave Courthouse by west door

Ensenberger's[12], directly across Center Street, was built in 1926 in a modern eclectic interpretation of the Gothic style. The terra cotta panels were originally capped by Gothic arched spires. Remaining are the terra cotta medallions which suggest a medieval feeling.

On the southeast corner of Washington and Center is Dewenters[13]. This building has housed clothing businesses for over 100 years. On the third floor was Centre Hall where numerous meetings and entertainments were held. Lincoln gave his economically unsuccessful lecture on "Inventions and Discoveries" there.

Walk north along Center

On the southwest corner of Jefferson and Center[14] (Bloomington Academy of Beauty Culture) stands a good example of turn-of-the-century Romanesque style using shoved-jointed brick work in the arches and bracketed cornices.

On the northwest corner is the Illinois House[15], a Romanesque-influenced building with a fine copper Second Empire roof.

In 1900 fire destroyed a large part of downtown Bloomington (see map). As a result much of what you have seen and will see was built at the same time right after the fire.

On the northeast corner (Rolands[16]) is another fine Romanesque building with decorative detail showing the influence of Louis Sullivan.

Walk east along Jefferson

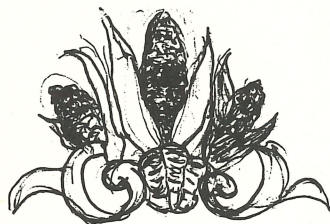
Notice the carved stone and cornices on these buildings, many of which incorporate design elements of the Renaissance.

On the northwest corner of Main and Jefferson is the old Corn Belt Bank Building[17]. George Miller was the architect and he combined many of the styles popular at the turn of the century. There is imaginative use of brick at the second floor

with carvings below and ornate frieze work and brackets above. Note the unusually small shoved brick joints.

Across the street on the southeast side of Jefferson and Main is the Greisheim Building[18] — Bloomington's first skyscraper in 1896 and immediately rebuilt after the 1900 fire.

Walk north along the west side of Main Street



As we progress beside the old Corn Belt Bank notice the massive rough stone base in imitation of tenth century Romanesque which changes to sweeping brick work above the second floor. In the center of the capitals above the decorative first floor pilasters

you can see ears of corn. And finally there is even a small false window on the north end of the building — a typical Romanesque feature.

From the west side of the street one has a nice view of the six Neo-Classic buildings[19] on the north end of the east side of Main Street between Jefferson and Monroe Streets, which gives one the feeling of the unity of line created by these buildings that once covered the whole block.

Walk west on Monroe and cross Center

On the northeast corner of Monroe and Center stands the old Bloomington Market House[20]. It was built by Benjamin Hoopes in 1868 as a place to house all butchers in Bloomington. Due to anti-monopoly suits the plan never materialized. It housed the Pantagraph from 1868 to 1875, the McLean County Farm Bureau and State Farm Insurance Company for a short time. It was built in Italianate style with window treatment similar to the building to the east.

Return to Main and proceed north

On the northeast corner of Main and Monroe is the Evans Building[21] (Neu-Optical), built in 1873 in the Italianate style; it originally housed a wholesale grocer. The recent work on the building has treated the design with respect. Across the street another Italianate building has been painted to highlight the heavy brackets on the cornice.

Proceed north to Market Street

On the southeast corner of Main and Market is the Eddy Building[22], built in 1894. It was designed by George Miller

in the Victorian Romanesque style and uses traditional elements with modern adaptations, such as the bay windows. The Eddy Building is a very eclectic structure with interesting stone carving placed on it in a seemingly random manner. In the main hallway is a brass griffin at the foot of the stairway, a hint of past grandeur.

Walk east on Market Street

On the north side of the street stands the former Grand Opera House[23], also known as the Illini Theatre and the Chatterton (west of Lucca's Grill). Inside these

walls were heard and seen Galli Curci, Paderewski and Ruth St. Dennis.

On the south side of the street is the General Telephone Building with a nice Art-Deco entrance (1941).

Look across East Street

The Kaiser-Van Lear Building[24] (Clark and Barlow) was built in 1930 in the International style, influenced by the Bauhaus movement. Note the horizontal band of structural glass block.

At the foot of East Street stands a Bloomington landmark, the Scottish Rite Temple[25]. Joseph Petarde did the ornamental stone work over the doors and in the banding across the front of the building.



Proceed south on East Street

The old Post Office[26] (O.D.C.) is a well executed Neo-Classic Revival structure built in 1928. It shows a studied formalism and has a handsome copper roof.

Continue south on Monroe Street

On the southeast corner of Monroe and East is the Second Presbyterian Church[27], a fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, built in 1898. Note the arches, the massive stone composition, the "bricked-up window" and the faces carved in the capitals on the west entrance. The north entrance is decorated with delicately carved vines with a repetition of the face motif.

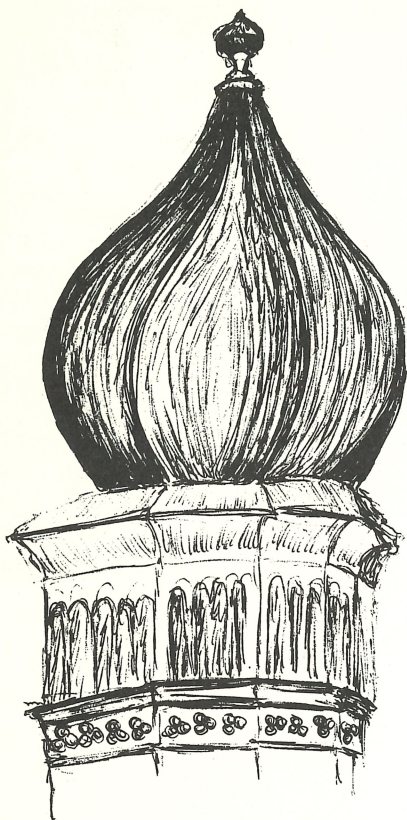


Walk east on Monroe to Prairie

On the southwest corner is the old Christian Science Church[28] (Pentecostal). It is an excellent example of Roman Revival style, a small copy of the Pantheon, built in 1908.

On the southeast corner is the old Moses Montefiore Temple[29] (Loving Missionary Baptist Church) which was completed in 1889 and is another example of George Miller's work. The style is essentially Richardsonian Romanesque combined with Byzantine elements which dictate the design unity. The horseshoe arch is used for all windows and doors, yet the gable ends are treated with a multifoil arch to harmonize with the copper onion domes. The windows and gables considered as a whole create a feeling of delicacy showing a remarkable use of stone well cut by August Laufer, a local German stone mason.

On the north side of Monroe east of Prairie is the former Jefferson School[30] (District 87 Educational Services Center), an Art-Deco building with stone carvings over the



southern doors, apparently one for boys and the other for girls, done in modern stylized realism, a popular style during the 1930's.

Proceed south on Prairie for two blocks

This gives a good view of the old State Farm Corporate Headquarters[31] which was built in a number of stages in the Art-Deco style between 1929 and 1941.

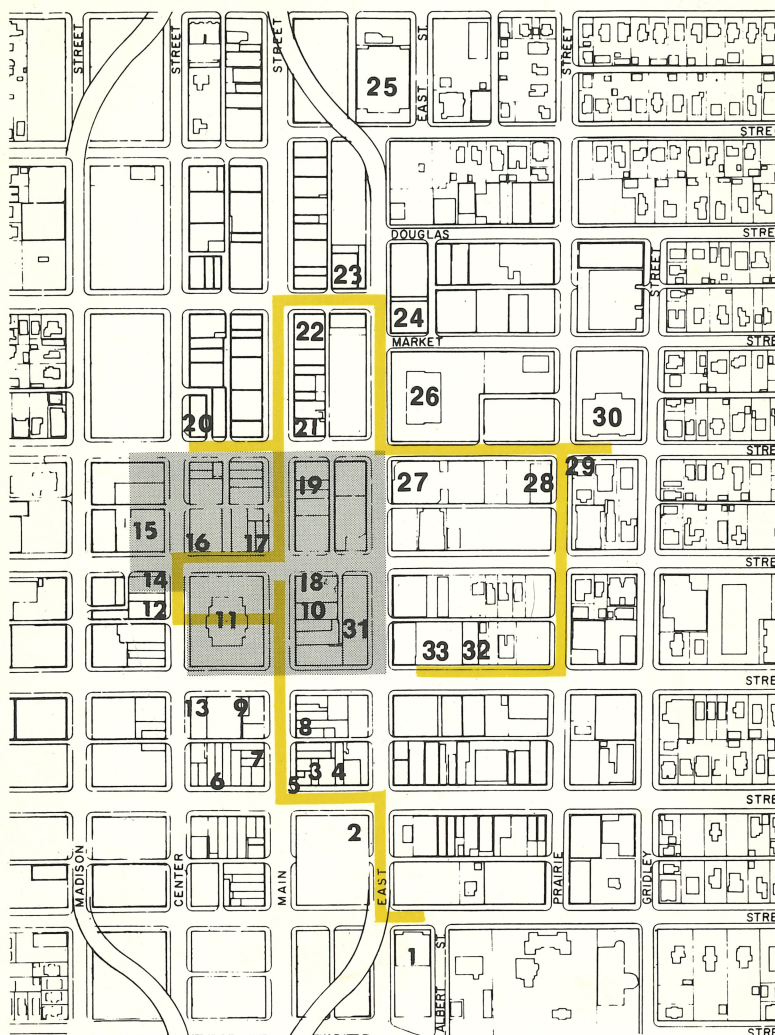
Turn west on Washington Street

The building at 210 E. Washington is in the Federal style[32]. It formerly housed the Bloomington Club and the second floor is now the McLean County Arts Center.

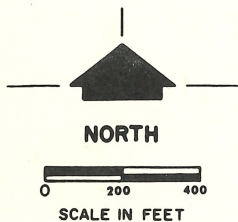
In the small park to the west of the building stands the Trotter Memorial Fountain[33], carved by Lorado Taft in 1911 to commemorate the Trotter Family. Georgiana Trotter was an attorney and the first woman in the

United States to be naturalized as a U.S. citizen. As a member of the School Board she felt she should be a citizen even though she could not vote. Taft commented on the sculpture that for him it was "a play spell in the midst of crowding duties, an affectionate message for little people to come . . . that little ones had played here long before we came."

The Irvin Theater, 204 E. Jefferson St. can be seen from Withers Park. Note the flamboyant decorative detail on the upper level. The most prominent features in the eclectic design are the round arch with a false-front peak over it, outlined and decorated in white, capped with a soaring eagle. The line of brackets and decorative work balance each side of the building with unusual pillars on top holding up blossoming globes.



Tour Route



- Tour Route
- Downtown area destroyed in the 1900 fire